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Chaucer's Friar John and the Place of the Cat

Though subsequently never quite attaining the status it held in ancient Egypt, the cat has undoubtedly always held a special place in the West. Spreading first to Italy, and then throughout Europe as the Roman Empire expanded, the cat had, by the late Middle Ages, established itself very much on account of its practical attributes. The Bestiary, for example, drawing upon Isidore of Seville, informs us that, “[t]he cat (*musio*) is so named because it is inimical to mice (*muribus*).”¹ Consequently, although divested of the sacred status accorded to it by the Egyptians, the cat made itself perfectly at home within sacred spaces as readily as it did in the domestic environment, its characteristic independence no doubt accounting for its ubiquity in both spheres.² The Bestiary goes on to note that:

People call this animal cat (*catus*), from prey (*captura*); some say because it seeks (*captat*), that is, it observes. For it sees so keenly, that it overcomes the darkness of night with the brightness of day. Wherefore, “cat” comes from the Greek, that is, cunning.

[Hunc vulgus catum a captura vocant; alii dicunt quod captat, id est, videt. Nam tanto acute cernit, ut fulgore luminis noctis tenebras superet. Unde a Greco venit catus, it est, ingeniosus.]³

Cunning the cat may be but, as with most examples derived from Isidore, the Bestiary resists the easy temptation of allegory and moralisation. Instead, it is described very much in terms of its workaday function: the cat is by virtue of its physical attributes a

skilled mouser – a description of the mouse follows that of the cat – and it is for this reason that it was domesticated by man. We may see the cat going about this business on a number of English misericords, with cats grasping mice with mouth or paw in Beverley Minster [Fig. 1], St Mary the Virgin, Godmanchester, Wells Cathedral and Winchester Cathedral [Fig. 2], and possibly a mouse cowering in its hole before two cats walking upright on a badly damaged carving in All Saints, Gresford.⁴ Indeed, there is no reason to doubt that, then as now, religious houses as well as domestic dwellings would both attract and welcome such skilled workers.⁵ Such was its ubiquity that Chaucer could employ a cat as a naturalistic domestic detail in his *Summoner's Tale*. In this *Tale*, when the obsequious Friar John arrives at the house of the bedridden Thomas, his first action is to make himself comfortable in a place in which he has been wont to receive a warm welcome in the past:

“Thomas,” quod he, “God yelde yow! Ful ofte
Have I upon this bench faren ful weel;
Heere have I eten many a myrie meel.”
And fro the bench he droof away the cat,
And leyde adoun his potente and his hat,
And eek his scrippe, and sette hym softe adoun.⁶

As is frequently noted, in driving away the cat from the bench, the friar is usurping the most comfortable seat in the house.⁷ Cats, after all, are known – from observation as much as anything else – for their boldness in occupying the softest, warmest place available.

This cat is but one of a number of animals mentioned throughout the *Summoner's Tale*; a feature of the tale's imagery which, as Helen Cooper notes, is "common to all the fabliaux":

Besides the literal cat and the proverbial sparrow, there are similes of a carthorse (2150) and a wild boar (2160). All are associated in one way or another with friar John, and serve ... as a commentary on his self-glorification.⁸

The other creatures mentioned – not including the contents of the diverse menus to which Friar John is accustomed or the horse within his exemplary narrative of Cirrus (l. 2081) – are an ant (l. 1825), a boar (l. 1829), a whale (l. 1930), a swan (l. 1930), a hawk (l. 1938), two lions (ll. 1989 and 2152), two serpents (ll. 1994 and 2001), and a shrew (l. 2044). However, whilst all of these latter creatures are employed figuratively – John "chirketh as a sparwe", Thomas is "as angry as a pissemyre" and "groneth lyk oure boor", and so on – the "literal" cat is the only member of the *Tale*'s menagerie to appear as itself: the cat, it would seem on first glance, is simply the cat. Indeed, Susan Crane has gone so far as to note that, "the full satiric effect of the friar's entrance is available only when the cat represents a sentient living cat."⁹ However, by looking to other late medieval representations of cats, both in written texts and the visual arts, we may begin to see a still more pointed satirical purpose behind Chaucer's seemingly casual reference to Friar John's first action upon entering the house.

Looking elsewhere, it is the cat's enthusiasm for "a good fatte mows,"¹⁰ of course, that leads to Tybert's violent encounter with the priest in the *Roman de Renart* and its derivatives; a body of work that was familiar to Chaucer, who drew upon it for

his *Nun's Priest's Tale*. In the *Roman*, Reynard uses the promise of an abundance of mice to trick Tybert into entering a priest's barn, in which he knows the priest has set a trap for the slayer of his poultry; namely the fox himself. The outcome of this rather ill-advised and decidedly unwelcome incursion of a cat into the clerical domain is depicted on two misericords within a series of Reynardian scenes in Bristol Cathedral,¹¹ [Fig. 3] the first of which captures the decisive moment at which the cornered and partially blinded Tybert:

sawe that he muste deye [and] sprange bytwene the prestes legges wyth
his clawes and with his teeth that he raught out his ryght colyon or balock
stone.¹²

The second [Fig. 4] shows the priest's wife, dame Iulock(e), grasping Tybert's tail in an attempt to pull him off the priest's back, where he is apparently firmly anchored by his claws. The scathing, mock-consolatory assurance to Iulock(e), that "ther is in the world many a chapel / in whiche is rongen but one belle",¹³ is typical of the gleefully amoral nature of Reynardian literature and, although clearly a very different kind of source material, we may nonetheless find a parallel here with the Bestiary, in that in both cases the behaviour of mouse-hunting cats is resolutely not explicitly moralised. In the case of the Bristol misericords, however, Kenneth Varty has persuasively suggested that the episodes depicted from this narrative, culminating in Reynard's execution, [Fig. 5] in which Tybert plays a prominent role by securing the rope,¹⁴ may have been selectively chosen for illustration precisely in order to:

turn a highly entertaining episode in a newly (?) popular story into a moral lesson, for the implication of the story as told in these five misericord carvings is that the perpetrator of such wrong-doing will come to a bad end and get his just deserts.¹⁵

Yet while this argument is persuasive, the perpetrator who receives his comeuppance here is Reynard: the cat is merely his unwitting dupe, victimised by means of the fox's manipulation of his natural desires. Whilst a moral could, of course, be drawn from this concerning the perils of being tempted to allow one's greed to gain mastery over restraint, Tybert's participation in the criminal's punishment, triumphantly perched atop the gallows, seems to mitigate against such a reading. Cats are not mentioned in the Bible yet, as is perhaps evinced by the Bristol misericords, this is not to suggest that the cat's natural taste for rodents could not be employed metaphorically or allegorically. As Douglas Gray has noted, cats often appear in depictions of the Creation where, in the "archetypal scene of animal harmony in Paradise," the cat already has hunter's eye on the mouse.¹⁶ [Fig. 6]

Chaucer's contemporary William Langland tells the most famous – and, characteristically, the most oblique – retelling of the fable of the rats, in which a mouse warns against belling the cat, lest such an act lead to further depredations being visited upon them.¹⁷ Whilst Langland may shy away from attributing an explicit moral to his anecdote – "What this metels bymeneth," he states somewhat unhelpfully, "Devyne ye—for I ne dar" – others employ the cat in a much less ambiguous fashion.¹⁸ Cats feature in few Aesopian fables,¹⁹ yet the moral of Robert Henryson's translation of "The Taill of the Uponlandis Mous, and the Burges Mous" is strongly asserted by alluding to the nature of the cat, "Gib hunter": "wanton" man,

we are told, had better cease his greedy, self-serving ways, for “[t]he Cat cummis”!²⁰ In spite of this clear, admonitory moral, however, we are more likely to remember the tale for its wonderfully vigorous description of the cat toying with his prey:

Fra fute to fute he kest her to and ffra,
Quhylis up, quhylis down, als cant as ony kid;
Quhylis wald he lat hir rin under the stra,
Quhylis wald he wink, and play with hir buk heid.
Thus to the selie Mous grit pane he did.²¹

In Henryson’s fable, as H. Harvey Wood notes, “the moralising, which is admittedly dull, is confined to the postscript,” while “the story is told as though it had never been told before, with a wealth of personal observation, simple pathos and lively humour.”²² Even when the cat is being employed for moral purposes, then, what we remember is the cat itself.

Given our paucity of biographical knowledge concerning Henryson, it is impossible to say whether his “personal observation” was of his own cat or not. However, we may expect cats to have found fair pickings about the Dunfermline school of which he was a master, as illustrated by Emir O. Filipović’s photograph of inky paw prints across a fifteenth-century manuscript from the Dubrovnik city archive, which spread across social media in 2013.²³ There is certainly an enjoyment of language in the description which is both suggestive of pleasure in the observation and, I suggest, affection for the subject who – fearsome though the moral may paint him – is described as “our Jolie Cat.”²⁴ Katharine M. Rogers has observed that, “[b]ecause the cat was identified with the essential but humdrum function of rodent-

catching it was not thought of as a luxury animal,”²⁵ which could account for the slight relaxation of the thirteenth-century *Ancrene Riwle*’s strictures upon the solitary life when it dictates that would-be anchoresses “schulen habbe na beast *bute cat ane*.”²⁶ Although elsewhere the *Ancrene Riwle* warns the reader that she must ever be vigilant against “þe Cat of helle” which will constantly claw at her in order to draw her heart and body into shame and sin – a warning akin to that noted in Henryson’s fable discussed above²⁷ – there is evidence to suggest that, as with Henryson, the relationship with one’s actual physical feline companion in an otherwise austere religious life may be considerably less threatening.²⁸

This bond between owner and cat is of course most famously seen in the ninth-century Irish poem, “Pangur Bán,” uniquely jotted onto a monastic copy of St Paul’s Epistles, in which the anonymous author rejoices in the similar delights of his cat – who, unlike the poet, is named – and himself. As Pangur takes his silent pleasure in exercising his skills at hunting and catching mice, so the monk takes delight in stalking and snaring subtleties of meaning. While but one copy of this poem survives, a later, much more widely disseminated example of the closeness between a solitary religious and a cat may be found in the life of St Gregory, as recounted in the thirteenth-century *Golden Legend*, which introduces us to:

[a] certain hermit, a man of great virtue, who had given up all for God and possessed nothing but a cat, which he petted and fondled in his lap almost as if it were a woman who lived with him.²⁹

Whilst it is not expanded upon, we may note in passing the author’s specific description of fondling the cat “almost as if it were a woman”: as Trevisa’s translation

of Bartholomaeus Anglicus's *De proprietatibus Rerum* notes, the cat is "a fulleccherous beste in youthe."³⁰ In view of this, we may perhaps see in *The Golden Legend* at least an undercurrent of admonishment for latent sexual desire beneath the hermit's pious exterior. In response to this hermit's criticism of Gregory's wealth in comparison with his own poverty, God speaks to him, informing him that it is not possession of wealth but love of wealth that defines a man as rich. The voice of the Lord elaborates on this point further, censuring the hermit thus:

How dare you compare your poverty with Gregory's riches—you, who prove every day that you love that cat, your treasure, by the way you stroke it, while he does not love the wealth that surrounds him, but despises it and gives it away openhandedly to all who need it?³¹

The hermit, naturally, is suitably chastised and sees the error of his judgmental ways ... although it is not recorded whether or not he made suitable restitution by openhandedly giving away his cat.

Whilst there is undoubtedly a discernible undertone of disapproval in this account of the excessive affection of the hermit for his pet, there is no explicit condemnation in the narrative, possibly in recognition of the valuable function served by the cat which we have already seen. However, an anonymous text of 1422, recording a woman's vision of the torments of Purgatory, takes a much harder line upon such matters.³² The woman's account, which is addressed to her confessor John Forest, Archdeacon of Surrey, tells of a sequence of dreams in which she encounters a nun by the name of Margaret who had been a friend to her in life and is now suffering extravagant torments in the "wondirfull and horrybill" fires of Purgatory, which are

“so horribill and so stynkande that all the creaturs in the werlde myghte never telle the wykkede smellynge thereof.”³³ Amongst the shockingly graphic burnings, tearings and other sufferings inflicted upon Margaret, her arms and legs are constantly chewed by a dog and a cat due, as the devil explains, to the “unresonabille lufe” which she felt for them upon earth. As if further explanation were necessary, the account goes on to reiterate that:

[a]s touchynge the lyttill hounde and the cate, thay were hir mawmetts the whils scho was on lyfe, and scho sett hir herte to mekill one swylke foulle wormes.

“And thare thay folowe me [moans Margaret] to encrese my paynes, ay till the bandes of syn be worne in sondir.”³⁴

As she awaits release through intercessory prayer, Margaret rues the affection she had for her pets, which she now casts as idolatry, leading to her rejection of them as disgusting vermin. As it continues all the while to gnaw at her limbs, the warning against over-fondness for one’s cat could hardly be more chilling. In this light, the reader of *The Summoner’s Tale* cannot but recall the caustic anecdote of the *Tale’s* Prologue, in which a swarm of friars erupt from the grimmest orifice in Hell.³⁵

Remains of cats have been recovered from a number of medieval contexts. Most frequently, they are found as disarticulated bones amongst other waste, but they are also found in discrete individual burials, suggesting close bonds with their owners, and occasionally buried within building foundations and wall-spaces, attesting to superstitious practices.³⁶ This archaeological evidence, along with textual references

as cited above, demonstrates that although it was initially a working animal, tolerated rather than welcomed in the home, the cat, over time, became more accepted and ultimately viewed with an affection which could, indeed, be viewed as verging on idolatry. It is interesting to note, however, that none of the diverse sources considered so far refers to any reciprocal affection from the cat: the cat, as is generally the case, just gets on with being a cat. A May 2009 column in *The Guardian*, discussing a recent article on the history of feline domestication published in *Scientific American*, sums things up rather neatly:

we didn't domesticate cats, they domesticated themselves. The animal was not tamed by the human, it looked the human up and down, liked what it saw and decided it would put on its cutest expression and pretend to be friends – a small price to pay for a high-mouse diet.³⁷

Although not recorded until the sixteenth century, the proverb, “a cat may look at a king,”³⁸ attests to the cat's ambivalence towards humans and their social hierarchies. Self-possessed, and the master or mistress of any situation in which it finds itself, the cat instantly seeks out the most advantageous situation for itself in any circumstance, even adapting itself to human requirements and desires if it is in his or her interest. This undoubtedly accounts for the cat's ambiguous position – and, indeed, symbolic significance – in which, as we have seen, a much-loved pet may also symbolise damnation. Yet in his *Manciple's Tale*, Chaucer, in providing a metaphor illustrating a woman's natural tendency towards infidelity, takes as given the true nature of cats:

Let take a cat, and fostre hym wel with milk

And tendre flessch, and make his couche of silk,
And lat hym seen a mous go by the wal,
Anon he weyveth milk and flessch and al,
And every deyntee that is in that hous,
Swich appetite hath he to ete a mous.
Lo, here hath lust his dominacioun,
And appetit fleemeth discrecioun.³⁹

However comfortable we may make a cat, says Chaucer, presumably expecting uniform agreement from his audience, its natural appetites will uncontrollably take hold as soon as temptation arises; a situation amusingly expressed in the cats causing domestic chaos in the Bestiary manuscript, Bodleian MS Bodley 764 fol 51r. [Fig. 7] Reversing gender roles, this characteristic is also employed in *The Miller's Tale*, in which Abolon's desire for Alison is thus described: "if she hadde been a mous, / And he a cat, he wolde hire hente anon,"⁴⁰ suggesting that beneath his affected manners dwells a barely-contained animal lust.⁴¹ As Edward Topsell would conclude in the early seventeenth century:

[the cat] is a dangerous beast and ... therefore as for necessity we are constrained to nourish it for the suppressing of small vermin, so with a wary and discreet eye we must avoid its harms, making more account of its use than of its person.⁴²

And this, of course, is the position that Friar John adopts in the *Summoner's Tale*.

Whilst not a mouser, Friar John nonetheless speaks of his calling to “fisshe Cristen mennes soules.”⁴³ It is a boasting claim to the apostolic life which, in its proximity to his actions upon arriving in the house with which we began, seems to me to be less suggestive of Christ than it is of a cat; and he most certainly appears reluctant to, as the proverb has it, wet his paws.⁴⁴ If this suggestion perhaps seems to be making rather too much of this perceived hint, it should be remembered that this is, after all, the *Canterbury Tale* in which we are required to pay the closest attention to such linguistic hints and ambiguities, with resonances frequently picked up much further apart in the text. Most notably, Friar John’s exasperated, “What is a ferthyng worth parted in twelve?” comes more than eighty lines before Thomas re-casts the question in terms of his own farting,⁴⁵ its comic significance only fully realised if we are attuned to the contexts in which the near homophone is repeated. It seems, then, that there is every reason to suspect that Chaucer would expect his audience to be paying sufficient attention to see the ironic significance of Friar John claiming to be a fisher of men’s souls so shortly after he has adopted the cat’s position. Indeed, in describing that, as he usurps the cat’s place, John also strips himself of the outward tokens of his calling – between moving the cat and sitting down, “[he] leyde adoun his potente and his hat, / And eek his scrippe” – Chaucer appears to be further emphasising his transformation, revealing the animal nature beneath his outward trappings.

With particular reference to animals represented on misericords, Luuk Houwen notes that many animals may carry diverse, even contradictory, meanings – an observation which is certainly true of cats, and one which Houwen offers in support of his thesis that we should not look for meaning in the purely decorative.⁴⁶ Although an undoubtedly valid approach, I tend to disagree, seeing animals in church

decoration and, by extension, in broader commentary upon the Church, as being primarily employed for their symbolic potential, with ambiguity and contradiction being very much a part of this function to be exploited to the full.⁴⁷ As Malcolm Jones has observed, the cat in medieval art is “a multivalent symbol, whose meaning is dependent on a careful reading of the context in which each individual feline is depicted.”⁴⁸ The hunting cats we find on misericord carvings, for example, may provide food for thought whether we consider them in terms either of Pangur Bán or of “þe Cat of helle”; one reading does not preclude the other, while both – along with any other points along the intervening spectrum – are accorded significance beyond mere representation of a resident mouser on account of their position in the devotional centre of the church. Likewise, I would suggest that there may be a similar inference to be drawn from the reference to the cat in *The Summoner’s Tale*. In spite of Chaucer’s claim in *The General Prologue* that his “wit is short,”⁴⁹ there is, of course, ample evidence to the contrary throughout his works, not least in *The Summoner’s Tale*’s deft linguistic play and subtle employment of animal imagery. Consequently, it seems more than likely that, rather than employing the cat as the only animal to be used in a non-figurative manner throughout the *Tale*, Chaucer expects us to acknowledge its “concrete representation,”⁵⁰ but simultaneously to see beyond this and pick up its figurative nature amongst the other subtleties of this ostensibly simple – and even rather coarse – narrative. Douglas Gray sees a moral significance in the cat being “pushed out of the (not very holy) picture by a distinctly unholy man,”⁵¹ but I believe we can go further in taking this usurpation of the cat’s position as drawing an explicit parallel between the mendicant orders and these beasts who, although permitted into the house to fulfil a necessary function, ingratiatingly work their charms in pursuit of their own interests without a thought for those whom they

apparently serve. Like the cat, Chaucer suggests, the friar will drop all semblance of domestication and resort to his rapacious, bestial nature at the first provocation – a view which is borne out by Friar John’s outburst when he is crudely duped by Thomas – a warning which adds further depth to the rich vein of antifraternality that surfaces throughout *The Canterbury Tales*, but nowhere more than in Fragment III.

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Fig. 4: Misericord depicting Tybert clinging to the priest's back, Bristol Cathedral. Courtesy Misericordia International.

Fig. 5: Misericord, Bristol Cathedral (Misericordia International).

Fig. 6: Bodleian Library MS Douce 135 fol. 17v (The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford).

Fig. 7: Bodleian Library MS Bodley 764 fol. 51r (The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford).

¹ Willene B. Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts: The Second-Family Bestiary. Commentary, Art, Text and Translation* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), 161.

² On the cult of the cat and its dispersal into folklore, see Katharine Briggs, *Nine Lives: The Folklore of Cats* (New York: Dorset Press, 1980), 1-18.

³ Clark, *Medieval Book of Beasts*, 161.

⁴ I have not seen the latter, which is described in G. L. Remnant, *A Catalogue of Misericords in Great Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 194. For further misericord examples, see also Douglas Gray, "Notes on Some Medieval Mystical, Magical and Moral Cats," in *Langland, the Mystics and the Medieval English Religious Tradition: Essays in Honour of S. S. Hussey*, ed. Helen Phillips (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990), 185-202, at 192-3.

⁵ In addition to any number of cats to be encountered when visiting churches, see Richard Surman's popular photographic collections, including *Church Cats* and *Cathedral Cats*, which have gone through many editions with HarperCollins.

⁶ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, III (D) 1772-7. All Chaucer citations are to *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn., ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁷ See, for example, Derek Pearsall, *The Canterbury Tales* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1985), 224.

- ⁸ Helen Cooper, *The Canterbury Tales*, second edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 183. The sparrow is mentioned in l. 1804.
- ⁹ Susan Crane, "Cat, Capon, and Pig in *The Summoner's Tale*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 34 (2012): 319-24, at 321.
- ¹⁰ *The History of Reynard the Fox, Translated and Printed by William Caxton, June 1481*, ed. Edward Arber (London: English Scholar's Library, 1878), 20.
- ¹¹ The sequence is discussed in Kenneth Varty, *Reynard, Renart, Reinaert and Other Foxes in Medieval England: The Iconographic Evidence* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), 118-24.
- ¹² *The History of Reynard the Fox*, 22.
- ¹³ *The History of Reynard the Fox*, 23. As Jan Goossens notes, the *Roman de Renart* places this observation in the mouth of Tybert, thereby according himself some solace for his own losses, whilst "[i]n the Netherlandish version, which is the basis for all subsequent European renderings of this scene, the words of the cat are put into the mouth of the fox": Jan Goossens, "The Ill-Fated Consequence of the Tom-Cat's Jump, and its Illustration," in *Reynard the Fox: Social Engagement and Cultural Metamorphoses in the Beast Epic from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Kenneth Varty (Oxford: Berghahn, 2000), 113-124, at 113.
- ¹⁴ This follows the story as recounted in *The History of Reynard the Fox*, 32-3.
- ¹⁵ Varty, *Reynard, Renart, Reinaert*, 124. It may be noted in passing that the scene of Tybert being dragged from the priest's back does not appear in written sources.
- ¹⁶ Gray, "Mystical, Magical and Moral Cats," 186.
- ¹⁷ William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman: a Complete Edition of the B-Text*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (London: Everyman, 1995), B Prologue 146-208. A version of this fable was used by Bishop Brinton in a sermon preached at St Paul's Cross on 18 May 1376: see Thomas Brinton, *The Sermons of Thomas Brinton*, ed. Mary Aquinas Devlin, 2 vols. (London, 1954), 2: 315-21. On Brinton's use of the fable, see Eleanor H. Kellogg, "Bishop Brinton and the Fable of the Rats," *PMLA* 50 (1935), 57-68. Whilst the belling of the cat does not appear on English misericords, it is depicted in Kempen. Sebastian Brant picks up on the image in chapter 110 of his *Ship of Fools*, censuring those who, "on the cat the bells ... place / Which once their fool-ears used to grace": ed. and trans. Edwin H. Zeydel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), 358. A fool is depicted undertaking this act in the accompanying woodcut in the 1494 edition.
- ¹⁸ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, B Prologue 209-10.
- ¹⁹ Rogers notes that "[o]nly five Aesopian fables feature cats, and two of them turn on their predatory guile": Rogers, *Cat*, 30.
- ²⁰ Robert Henryson, *The Morall Fabillis of Esope the Phrygian* (1571 edition), in *Poems and Fables*, ed. H. Harvey Wood Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1978), 16.
- ²¹ Henryson, *Morall Fabillis*, 14.
- ²² Henryson, *Morall Fabillis*, xv.
- ²³ See <http://theappendix.net/blog/2013/3/of-cats-and-manuscripts>. Accessed 10/03/16.
- ²⁴ Henryson, *Morall Fabillis*, 14.
- ²⁵ Rogers, *Cat*, 45.
- ²⁶ *Ancrene Wisse. A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS402, with Variants from Other Manuscripts*, ed. Bella Millett et al, EETS o.s. 325 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 157. My italics.
- ²⁷ In this context, it is interesting to note that Edward of Norwich, in his early fifteenth-century treatise on hunting based on Gaston de Foix's *Livre de chasse*, adds the personal comment that, "one thing I dare well say that if any beast hath the devil's spirit in him, without doubt it is the cat, both the wild and the tame": Edward of Norwich, *The Master of Game*, ed. William A. Baillie-Grohman and F. N. Baillie-Grohman (1909. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 71.
- ²⁸ *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwle. The "Vernon" Text, Edited from Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Eng. poet. a. I.*, ed. Arne Zettersten and Bernhard Diensberg, EETS o.s. 310 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 37-8.
- ²⁹ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), I: 177. I would like to thank Dr Katherine Lewis of the University of Huddersfield for drawing my attention to this story.
- ³⁰ Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things*, trans. John Trevisa, ed. M. C. Seymour (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1975), 1228.
- ³¹ Bartholomaeus, *On the Properties of Things*, 1228.

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- ³² Anonymous, "A Revelation of Purgatory," in *Women's Writing in Middle English*, ed. Alexandra Barratt (London: Longman, 1992), 163-76.
- ³³ "A Revelation of Purgatory," 165.
- ³⁴ "A Revelation of Purgatory," 172-3.
- ³⁵ See Gray, "Mystical, Magical and Moral Cats," 197-8 on the cat as the devil.
- ³⁶ Terry O'Connor, "Thinking about Beastly Bodies," in *Breaking and Shaping Beastly Bodies: Animals as Material Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. Aleksander Pluskowski (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2007), 1-10, at 8.
- ³⁷ Paul MacInnes, "Only in it for the Biscuits," *The Guardian* (30th May 2009), 35.
- ³⁸ Jennifer Speake (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 44.
- ³⁹ Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, IX (H) 175-82.
- ⁴⁰ Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, I (A) 3346-7.
- ⁴¹ This, of course, echoes Bartholomaeus' observation cited above.
- ⁴² Edward Topsell, *Topsell's Histories of Beasts*, ed. Malcolm South (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1981), 41.
- ⁴³ Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, III (D), 1820.
- ⁴⁴ Chaucer refers directly to this proverb in *The House of Fame*, III, 1783-5: "For ye be lyke the sweynte cat / That wolde have fish; but wostow what? / He wolde nothing wete his clowes." Cf. Wycliffe Bible, Matthew 4.19: "And he said to them, Come ye after me, and I shall make you to be made fishers of men."
- ⁴⁵ Chaucer, *House of Fame*, III (D) 1967 and 2149.
- ⁴⁶ Luuk Houwen, "Bestiaries in Wood? Misericords, Animal Imagery and the Bestiary Tradition," in *The Playful Middle Ages: Meanings of Play and Plays of Meaning. Essays in Memory of Elaine C. Block*, ed. Paul Hardwick (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 195-231.
- ⁴⁷ See, for example, Paul Hardwick, "'Hares on the Hearthstones' in Medieval England," *Reinardus* 20 (2007-2008), 29-39, in which I argue that the hare's symbolic instability accounts for its occurrence as a figure to be feared in the domestic sphere, even to the extent of its becoming an apocalyptic indicator.
- ⁴⁸ Malcolm Jones, "The Cat in the Badge – the Iconography of Late Medieval Bicaudal and Other Felines...", in *Beyond Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges: Essays in Honour of Brian Spencer*, ed. Sarah Blick (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2007), 151-69, at 168.
- ⁴⁹ Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, I (A) 746.
- ⁵⁰ Crane, "Cat, Capon, and Pig," 319. I would suggest that this is true, also of *The Miller's Tale*, for which Sarah Stanbury argues that the absent cat which is mentioned is distinct from other animals within the *Tale*, in that it, "uniquely, is material, even if not present. It is not a metaphor." While, as she suggests, the hole through which the cat passes undoubtedly offers a telling delineation – and bringing together – of domestic spaces, it surely also speaks of the hidden activities within the house which drive the narrative forward. Sarah Stanbury, "Derrida's Cat and Nicholas's Study": *New Medieval Literatures* 12 (2010): 155-67, at 157.
- ⁵¹ Gray, "Mystical, Magical and Moral Cats," 202.